

four

Quarters

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Alma e Dio: A Syllogism

● Barbara Nauer Folk

(For the Marycrest Sisters)

First premise

She came from an Iowa farm, straight haired, flat chested, sun browned, and slat-legged, with a nose peeled from days of driving a tractor, probably recklessly, down young rows of whispering corn. Presenting to the world a triangular face sporting something between a smirk and a smile, she resembled a cat one might find in a barn, scrawny from mouse chasing, nowhere near its original color and ideally at home in the hay. "Oh, Mum," she sobbed on her mother, who was losing her only child, and, "Oh, Daddy," on her red-necked father. "Oh, Alma Jean," said he, patting her with the same gentle and embarrassed affection he bestowed on his white-faced calves. And so they parted at the nuns' college.

It was amazing how she got along, surprising that she stayed at all, what with losing personal belongings and her schedule card of classes once or twice before the term had officially started. It may be that some gentle Sister argued wisely against all the phone calls home, or that the heroic roommate did, both forbearing to think what sublime peace would follow were Alma Jean to leave forever, to take her trunks, her trinkets, her cataclysmic personality back to the place accustomed to them. But stay she did, and while the great oaks of the place suffered

their turning to amber and gold and the chapel altars to Advent's hue, she somehow gathered her loose ends together and prevailed in spite of it all.

The young men from the bishop's college near by were evidently glad of this. They came, as was their practice every year, in groups of four or five or even in droves, depending upon the occasion, to see what promise the new year gave for extra curricular activity. And they found Alma Jean, or rather collectively discovered her before the back-to-school mixer dance had scarce begun.

This caused no end of comment in the freshman residence hall. "Why, she's not even sexy," confided a girl who was, to a roommate as puzzled as she. And the two near strangers turned out their lamps and talked until morning after the dance, deciding in a spirit of kindling friendship that some women had it, and some women didn't, and neither vice nor virtue held the key.

Other young ladies took the mystery of Alma Jean more privately to heart. "What's she got that I haven't got?" wailed a busty little blond from Chicago who had been neglected. And no one could answer, not her roommate, nor Alma Jean's, nor even Alma Jean herself, who tried honestly to say when a group of them gathered around her to tease.

"I'll tell you what," she offered,

and it endeared her to them even while they snorted, "I'll take their names, and yours, and then if ever you need a —"

"Oh, Alma Jean," they wailed in chorus, scuffling back to their own rooms in their bobby pins, sweaters, and still-new houseslippers, heavy with a problem as old as the moon. "Oh, Alma Jean."

"Oh, Alma Jean." It became the catch phrase of the year, snickered by freshmen, sighed by nuns, moaned by sophisticated upperclassmen. Nobly intentioned, trying desperately to please, she succeeded in breaking all of the rules, even a few that had not yet been made. If a ten-thirty taxi had a flat tire and failed to get two passengers in for hours, one of these was sure to be Alma Jean. If some plumbing leaked, a locker jammed, some furniture toppled at midnight, or some library books were left out in the rain, it invariably had something to do with her. And she was always late, late for classes, late for chapel, late for dinner, which was served formally while quiet music played; late with term papers, not hopelessly so, but just far enough behind schedule that it required a handful of friends, themselves paper weary, and all of the idle typewriters on her dormitory floor to bring Alma Jean in on time.

The snow came, great sweeping storms of it, fine, powdery, crystalline, for this was the north country of windbreaked farms and small cities and a hundred like-named towns. Swept by a gloved male hand into the air over a girl, the snow would remain for some moments, were the light just so, like glitter in her hair. Having passed the holidays and the first semester, the freshmen belonged, were accepted, assigned responsibilities by student

leaders toward the Mardi Gras festival not many weeks away. Even Alma Jean had become a fact, a fixture, by the time the settling season of Lent was at hand. The eyebrows no longer lifted, the sighs of quiet outrage ceased to come when she, less angular now, less awkward, and more smartly dressed, waved gaily to her confederates from the arm of a basketball player or an outstanding member of the debating team at the bishop's college or the leading man from the latest play. She attended the Mardi Gras costume ball with the president of the men's student council; she dressed for safari, under one arm an elephant gun, under the other a rope which ended around the neck of her escort, a lion. And when the dawning of spring had drawn cotton from the closets, squirrels from hollows, and hearts from studies, she made it known that she was coming back next year. Those who had any reason to care took quiet note of the fact, as they did of the campus magnolia tree's bursting to bloom beside the Madonna's shrine. It was a natural part of the course of things, it was inevitable; it tugged at their hearts and mysteriously hurt them, even while it made them glad.

Second premise

He derived from a part of New York City where pushcarts were as common as street fights, where Italian, Irish, and German families held a faith in common and wrangled about everything else. Huge of frame and energetic of step, he looked like a mastiff, high headed and strong, striding confidently out to forage. He must have come in the front gate with the two great blue books under his arm, with the blood

in his eye and his free fist swinging and his white robes billowing in the wind. For that was how he always appeared, whether leaves or snow it was that he sent flying, with one or other of the Benziger volumes snugged in above his cinch like a football, a lance, or a pain in his side. And with him came his idea, perfectly absurd and surely his own, else how could he have been so on fire with it, that women, yes women, especially young women like these, could be trained to *think*.

Perhaps he put it that way to the college president, to the dean and the executive board of Sisters at the time they interviewed him. Perhaps he lunged in from the priory they had written to, thumped the two big volumes of the *Summa Theologica* on the piece of furniture nearest at hand, and gave it to them just like this: that he was Michael Victor Pizzano, a son of St. Dominic, through whose hands a host of seminarians had passed. He had a method, see, he even had it outlined, for cultivating in young people an inquiring habit of mind; this by exposing them grand scale to the incomparable Aquinas, Angel of the Schools and embodiment of the Church's own sweet mind. Were their girls suffocating under apologetics a half century behind? He would fill them with the breath of the Master. Were they starved, without knowing it, for the heart meat of the mysteries? Ah, he was a prophet in disguise.

He secured the teaching position, of course, and in effect the departments of Religion and Philosophy, which had been staffed until then by the resident chaplain and priests coming part time from the college close by. He usurped these, that is, not officially or by any threat of

violence, but by the simple and obvious method of offering to teach most of the courses therein. Naturally the sight of those broad and not unyouthful shoulders stooping eagerly to receive the bulk of the load brought heart to teachers overburdened by a rising enrollment, and the arrangement was fine all around. It was in this affable and commonplace manner that the second Italian rennaissance began.

The shock waves struck first. Strolling into those September classrooms where mild, zealous, tired men had been wont to teach religion, they found this white and shaggy giant switching back and forth. He was Father Mike, he told them. Name *Michael* meant *godly*, in case anybody was interested. "Father Mike," he repeated, hands on hips. "Get that and get a pencil and a notebook and no more."

No book?

"No books!" he roared as if he hated books, and when the last of them had struggled in, he announced with perfect simplicity, with an honesty that was almost embarrassing, that the moment of truth was at hand.

At first the thing that happened was only something in the air, a quickening, an excitement, a murmur more dreamed than heard. The course titles in the college bulletin had not even been tampered with, except for the word *Theology* replacing *Religion* before numerals I to IV. But a revolution was at hand, there was no denying that, as the nuns realized, with mixed emotions, hearing the thunder behind his doors.

Naturally his students loved, as students would, this romantic synthesis of prophet, ham, and hero, with the exception, that is, of the

ultra-refined, who could not abide his boisterousness. For rough he was, in speech and manner, surprisingly so for one of such exquisite taste in learning and the arts. His normal pace was a flourish, his haste a small tornado. And his laugh was enough to frighten the elderly nuns, a terrible ho-ho-ho. These never dared inquire, nor did anyone else, why he wore field boots to class.

Alma Jean and her classmates were sophomores when the inspired one arrived, and they knew, as students always know, that here, despite all else he might or might not be, was a great teacher, a teacher such as passes only once in a lifetime if at all; one of those rare beings whose passionate love for some discipline and true feeling for the human intellect enable him with seeming effortlessness to smash false idols, rend veils, widen horizons, and set the human spirit on fire.

He kept no notes, prepared each class singly the evening before, working directly from the texts of his beloved Aquinas. His jottings he made on such material as he found readily at hand. This could be a tattered envelope, a grocery bag, a piece of paper toweling, or, as once when he was especially distracted, the sleeve of his habit. But when transferred to a morning blackboard, these scribbles were discovered to have each numeral perfectly in place and every subheading carefully positioned. Transcribed again in female hand to an exercise book, and adorned with the parenthetical asides and brilliant examples he gave in class, they became sets of notes so perfect that years later a young woman would be able to be thrilled anew and transported back to reading them.

Their own name for his teaching

method was "the painless learning process." And of course for them it was painless indeed, this magical pervasion in minds crammed helter-skelter with arts, humanities, and sciences, of the integrating principle of Theology. That the fiery comet streaking so brilliantly across their narrow sky might actually be burning itself out in their behalf probably never occurred to them. They were taken up in those days with catching its sparks, interpreting its message, and bowing to its will. In brief, for the simple reason that their Abelard wanted it, several hundred Heloises tried to think.

This was not easy. In some cases, although no one had the heart to tell him, it was even impossible. For every female dialectician he brought to flower, and by the second semester several had risen, there were a dozen quiet seeds. Unwittingly, as was her way, Alma Jean led the opposition:

Major premise: My roommate is beautiful and popular.

Minor premise: My roommate uses Minipoo dry shampoo.

Conclusion: If I use my roommate's Minipoo dry shampoo, I too will be beautiful and popular.

"Oh, Alma Jean," groaned those within earshot, many of whom were as fallow as she. "Oh, Alma Jean."

Conclusion

She first drew his attention by her persistent tardiness. "Alma Jean's here, we can begin," he would chant at the start of the logic classes wherein he unashamedly taught metaphysics. And she kept it by her inability, curious in a normally bright student, to give coherent oral replies to problems he posed in class.

"Hey, what'd you get on that last paper?" he demanded after one

particularly exasperating exchange.

"Dig in," she answered, rising with her pussycat grin.

"What?"

"Dig in, Father, across the top."

"Oh, a C. And how about the one before?"

"No rust on you."

"No rust on you, a B! Hoo, I musta been outa my mind."

He jounced down off the lecture platform and stood surveying her across three rows of chairs, swinging his rosary in lariat fashion.

"Tell me," he said finally, ignoring the snickers which came when he lifted one of the boots to an empty chair. "You like studying St. Thomas maybe?"

"Oh, yes, Father." She was genuinely enthusiastic.

He looked worried. "An' you listen what I say in class?"

She nodded.

"Hmmm." That was all he said, but he continued to study her thoughtfully with his cropped head tilted to one side and his foot resting heavily on the chair. "Hmmm," he mused a second time, breaking the pose to take a few turns around the front of the classroom. He was perhaps beginning to realize, as every serious man eventually will, that the female mind has certain peculiarities not profitably ignored. He seemed surprised to discover that she was still standing.

"Aw, siddown." He waved with feigned disgust, and had there not been a whole classroom full of the mysterious creatures sitting there watching and politely swallowing their smiles, he would surely have sat down on the edge of the platform, put his chin in his hands, and moped.

However, he was a determined man, and in the manner of determined men who have not yet reached

forty, he had an extraordinary amount of confidence. Surely it was this that kept his courage from ever seriously flagging. For it never did, nor, and this was even more remarkable, did his amazing energy, not even after he had added to his already incredible schedule evening discussions in aesthetics for the benefit of college lay personnel and some townspeople who had expressed a zealous interest.

Naturally there were those who had forebodings about the pace he was keeping, prudent administrators who were at once motherly women and, while realizing full well the futility of attempting to halt a runaway express train, still wished that for his own good the local Socrates would reduce his speed. These would have their hour, of course, as wisdom always does. There would in fact be a day when he would not be in the crowds applauding when Alma Jean, a senior and looking more like a poised and lovely Siamese than any denizen of a barn, would reign over two campuses as homecoming queen.

But the time for sadness was not yet. Springtime swelling that year over the cornbelt country found him still fervidly calling Divine lightning out of the skies and setting the grass roots aflame, standing booted astride Christianity's greatest mysteries, the dog-eared volumes never very far away, doing that for which he was made.

He was at his best on the Incarnation. On those occasions when he touched upon it, and these were many, he might have been the Archangel Michael himself, just returned from the throne of God. With his eyes alight and his big frame trembling with suppressed emotion, he would hold up before his students, like a wondrous sphere balanced

delicately on his fingertips, the mystery of the Incarnate Word.

Oddly, it was just at the close of one of these stirring deliverances that some devil in him, or some expression on Alma Jean, caused him to fire a sudden question.

"You there, what did I say?" It was to bring on an episode which long after, when broken health had dimmed his fire and maturity dwindled theirs, they could all remember with joy.

"What, Father?" she replied, rising with some surprise.

"I said, 'What did I say?' "

"Oh. About the Incarnation, Father."

"And what about the Incarnation?" His expression mingled mischief and seriousness almost equally.

"Well. That it — That God, I mean —" She trailed off into silence, looking at him as if to guess whether the mischief or the seriousness were going to prevail.

"Go on."

There was a very long pause; then, "I can't, Father."

"What do you mean, you *can't*." He sounded as if he had never heard the contraction before.

"Can't say it. I know it but I just can't say it."

"Oh, now, Alma Jean." For an instant the mischief vanished completely. "We've gone around on this before. If you really know it, you can say it." He spoke the last as it were revealed dogma, with a conviction enforced by his experience with that host of seminarians.

"But I just *can't*, Father." She was not smiling at all.

"Of course you can. Look, I'll get you started, huh?" He offered his assistance in tones that were quiet for him, and with surprising

gentleness. "God so loved the world — "

She took a deep breath and began slowly. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son — "

His eyes filled with hope at this beginning, his soaring spirit lifting him to his toes, where he was left foolishly balancing when she stopped again.

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" he exploded in a fit of nervous impatience. "What about the Atonement, an' the processions within the Trinity — " He was like a dog after a treed cat then, coming at her from all directions at once. However, the flailing about caused his rosary to become looped around the writing arm of a chair, and he was forced to stop and disengage himself. When he finally looked up, he realized, with a horror that left him open-mouthed, that she was starting to snifle.

"Oh, Alma Jean," he gasped. "Oh, my God, don't *cry*! Look — "

He started forward, fighting wildly to get into his trousers pocket. But when the handkerchief he produced turned out to be hideously soiled, he jammed it away and stood there helplessly waving his hands. "Somebody, *do* something!" he howled at the rest of them.

"No, no, that's all r-right, Father." She was crying and trying to smile at the same time, and so he stayed there with his fist against his mouth hoping, probably praying, for the best.

"It's all r-right. I just can't say it, Father. *It's so beautiful*."

"Oh," he said, still wearing his stricken expression. And then he repeated it, not so much a word this time as a sound of awakening, a prolonged and soulful sigh of perfect

understanding. "Oh-h-h."

After that, he looked at her for a long time, finally saying in a voice cracked, unnatural, and very soft, "You do know about the Incarnation, don't you, Alma Jean?"

"Yes, Father."

He sighed, his features revealing that he was strangely and deeply moved. "Then sit down, dear lady, please."

He turned his back then and went slowly toward the platform, using the interval to compose himself.

When he turned around again, he was able to smile, and once having done that, he began to laugh.

"Oh, Alma Jean." The echoes of his amusement sounded against the walls of the classroom, spilled out into the corridor, and tumbled thunderously down the stairs. "Oh, Alma Jean," cried that propounder of mysteries, going straight to the center of hers. "*You're gonna make some guy so ho-ho happy, all his life long!*"

The Minister of the Interior

● D. Quiatt

I don't complain; I sit and wait,
Hardly wondering what the day will bring,
What winds will blow or what small birds will sing,
What messengers will linger at the gate.

I cannot fish, and won't cut bait.
Who fishes deals in human suffering;
The other does not deal in anything.
Myself? I don't complain; I sit and wait.

I can't complain; my suffering
Is only not to love and not to hate,
Not to remember, not to anticipate—
To leave the phone in but to let it ring.

I am not subject here nor king.
I don't complain; I sit and wait.

Symposium on the Teaching of Creative Writing

Prefatory Note

Courses in writing have multiplied since World War II, principally because there has been strong demand for them from a large number of people whose ambition is to write professionally. The classes in writing stress both craftsmanship and artistry, and many of the offerings in the colleges and universities have the specific objectives of writing the short story, writing the essay, writing poetry, and writing for television, and such words are printed in the catalogues.

In some institutions the administrators have invited professional poets and fiction writers to conduct classes in the writing of their specialty, and writers have accepted, even though at the outset they may have had doubts about the success of their endeavors. Usually at the end of their stay on the college or university campus, these men have not been displeased with what had been accomplished, and a few have spoken in enthusiastic terms about the usefulness of such courses.

However, despite the fact that higher institutions sponsor writing courses and despite the gratification many teachers get from observing the progress of their students, and despite the continuing demand for the courses, a sizable group of thoughtful people are not convinced that writing courses do what students expect of them — develop professional writers. They ask such questions as Is it possible to teach others the art of writing imaginatively, artistically, creatively? Are not courses in creative writing a species of deception? What evidence, if any, is there to show that classes in writing help a writer become a maker of a poem, or a story, or a play?

Four Quarters has asked over a hundred writers, editors, educators, and teachers of writing two questions about the teaching of creative writing and the courses offered in that subject. Of the one hundred people who were asked, more than fifty per cent responded. These responses have been studied and assembled to compose a Symposium on the Teaching of Creative Writing, and the following pages will show the reactions of thoughtful men and women to the questions.

The Editors.

Survey of Responses and Introduction to the Series

● Brother Felician Patrick, F.S.C.

In a period when minds are too often asked to meet by mail, a questionnaire on the subject of creative writing might have been expected to evoke only slight and tedious response from the busy persons who were confronted. "Can creative writing be taught?" "Are courses in creative writing valid?" From a hundred people whose views merit attention, *Four Quarters* has received generous and varied response.

Besides the predictable unanimity about the impossibility of teaching creativity as such, there was considerable agreement upon the need for a closer look at the terms of the questions. That "creative" and "writing" came in for scrutiny from many angles is not surprising; but there was a refreshing awareness that the concept of teaching as such is far from univocal and far from clear. Indeed, in quantity and quality, the thinking about the teaching process may emerge as the greatest value of the symposium. What happens, for example, in one response after another, is that denials of the possibility of teaching writing are qualified immediately by the substitution of some form of coaching, or stimulation, or individual conference, or group criticism, that another person might have called teaching in the first place.

Crossing the boundaries of the main occupational polarities of the writers — teachers of writing, teachers of literature, active professional writers — are several oft-recurring attitudes, ranging from fed up, to hesitant, to enthusiastic. When we group the responses, not at all rigidly, by occupational emphasis, different patterns tend to emerge. The practicing artists show the same disconcerting shunning of theoretical precision that they manifest at readings of their works. The professors, on the contrary, seem so much clearer at the critical level, perhaps underscoring the problem that it is nearly impossible to teach an art, but easier to teach about one.

Mainly because of the huge incidence of spontaneous repetition, many responses to the questionnaire will go unpublished. The *number* who say, yes, you can teach everything but creativity, is important in itself. Some shorter opinions will be included because of the lively way they take exception to this basic position. Most of the longer replies have gone generously beyond the strict limits of the question, and have suggested four major groupings of essays.

Teachers of writing, Don Wolfe, Theodore Morrison, and Bernard Wirth, appear in this issue with perhaps the best probings into the terms of the actual questions. A somewhat more specialized look at the problems of the artist in this connection will appear in the work of Ray Bradbury, James Michener, and Anthony West, to appear in the next issue. Two smaller groupings, both somewhat tangential to the main focus but taking our attention into interesting areas a few degrees off strict center, will form a third

installment. In the first of these groups, emphasis upon the role of creative writing in the curriculum is furnished by Sam Hynes, Mark Schorer, and George Herman. Finally, the adaptability of the *Four Quarters* questions to the enduring styles, preoccupations, and personalities of those who answer will appear in the provocative contributions of Katherine Anne Porter, Sister Madeleva, John O'Hara, Stringfellow Barr, and John Cogley. We shall see Theodore Morrison insisting upon a rephrasing of the first question: "What is communicable about the art of writing?" Ray Bradbury and Don Wolfe will probe the teaching process; and Anthony West will prefer to discuss the problem in terms of illuminating specific examples. George Herman, stressing the second *Four Quarters* question, will springboard into incisive comments about undergraduate education.

Amid the abundance of response, questions remain unanswered. Of all who say "Yes," few seem anxious to try to teach writing. And, in the face of practical needs, few can conceive of the teaching of writing in a way different from the teaching of painting and music. It is still mainly a question of going around the room from student to student and showing each one in terms of the individual production on which he is at work.

● President-Elect John F. Kennedy

I am sure you know that my every energy lately has been devoted to putting forward ideas and ends that your projected symposium on creative writing seeks to explore.

The same circumstance, however, permits me little time for the real reflection that is needed for consideration of such a subject, and in such company. So I trust you will understand why I must be brief and why also, under present circumstances, I see the matter of creative writing as extending far distances from the campus and the workshop.

Surely, creative writing can and must be taught, and effective courses to that end be praised and sought after.

We need a creative America today — and a creative world — peopled by articulate and creative individuals. For those who cannot speak, those who cannot bring forth new ideas and put them before their fellows for judgment and action, cannot lead and they cannot be free. They can only follow and, in the end, be enslaved in one form or another. They have no vision, no imagination to beckon them, no direction in which to move — save where the pressures of the moment may push them.

Creative writing becomes to me, then, in its highest sense, not alone the creation of fiction or non-fiction of purely original source, but the further putting forth of new *ideas*.

We must observe the caution that there can be a difference between creativeness and craftsmanship. The excellent craftsman is a needed man. He produces the staple product we depend on in everyday living. But the excellent craftsman who is also creative, who moves forward with a new idea, stands a good chance of carrying others with him as well.

We are challenged in the world today both in action and in idea. Where we rely on craftsmanship alone in facing that challenge, we shall be in danger. Where we sit still and do not move, we shall be in danger. Where we move out and ahead, with new ideas — where we lead — we shall meet the challenge successfully and look for new ones beyond.

And so the matters of craftsmanship and creativeness come together as necessary complements — in creative writing as in all other fields in which we face today's challenge — and tomorrow's promise.

● Don Wolfe

I am astonished at the statement that writing cannot be taught. This is to my mind as absurd as saying it cannot be learned. Certainly every writer had a teacher, as Shakespeare had his Marlowe and the group at the Mermaid Tavern; more inspiring teachers one cannot imagine. As Bret Harte was Mark Twain's teacher, so Hawthorne taught Melville, and Conrad taught Crane. Say they taught each other; still they had teachers, as Maupassant had Flaubert. Every novelist goes to school to his predecessors and often to his contemporaries, as Faulkner and Hemingway learned from Anderson, and Thomas Wolfe learned much from a great teacher, Maxwell Perkins.

Ah, say the critics (among them John Aldridge), that is different. I mean teaching writing in classes. That is impossible. Such critics forget that there are as many different classes as there are writing teachers. Every young novelist learns in a different way, and almost every teacher I know approaches a novelist as a unique human being who should develop a style of his own and a vision of his own. At the New School, where I have taught a novel-writing seminar for some years, no two of us approach the teaching of writing in the same way. The young novelists go from teacher to teacher (as they go from writer to writer among themselves), learning as much as they can from each. When they read the great books, they begin to see that Melville or Conrad has achieved in a superlative degree what they have achieved perhaps in only a sentence on a page. But one incandescent image of genuine literary power is a victory; it means that other victories are in the offing; if the writer keeps on, he can eventually write a sentence, then a paragraph, then a whole page of such images. Even a teacher who is not a writer himself can help the young writer thus far. There are a hundred things in the craft of style a young writer can learn from a gifted teacher.

Even when he has an acceptable style, however, the young writer is still far from being a short story writer or a novelist. But he has, let us say, indomitable energy and will for the next steps. Who can advise him? Who can teach him? Many people: his writing teachers, his struggling colleagues, books by writers about their art, but especially great writers, even as Keats buried himself in Shakespeare while he was writing *Endymion*. The writing teacher can be the coach who knows all the resources, all the teachers, from whom the writer learns. He can show the young writer the structure of the

short story, with emphasis on the quality of the dilemma; he can show the writer how to search for the dilemma in his own life that is new in literature and needs to be explored. He can help the writer to depend on himself, to select the criticism of his work that he feels most valid; only the writer can finally decide which road to take in developing his style or choosing a theme of significance for his generation.

Does anyone claim that a writer is born with a sense of imagery, structure, sentence rhythm? If not, where does he learn it? Is he born with a sense of the vast unknowable evil that dominates the mood of *Moby Dick*? If not, where does he learn these things? How important was the praise from his sixth-grade teacher? How important, as in Faulkner's case, was the fact that his grandfather or his great-grandfather was a novelist?

Every writer has to come to originality of structure, such as in the last burning scene of Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly." To think of a culminating scene is a creative action in part inscrutable and unknowable. Yet the writer will usually trace a highly original scene back to something he has seen. A teacher may recognize the originality of a scene that the young novelist passes by. He must be taught the dignity of his observations, of his imaginings, of his half-thoughts.

The teacher of writing can make every writer in the class a teacher of the others.

I grant that a writer cannot be taught to dedicate his life to writing. This is the most important step of all, involving five or ten years of solitary endeavor before his first story or his first novel is published. But even in this step, who teaches a man to *aspire* to great writing? From whom did Milton learn to "leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let it die"?

● Theodore Morrison

"Can writing be taught?" Yes and no. No species of instruction can confer talent or aptitude where it doesn't exist. In this sense, writing can't be taught, and neither can anything else. Try teaching me mathematical physics! Yet no one is going to say, as a general assertion, that physics can't be taught.

I object to the question "Can writing be taught?" I think it paralyzes discussion. I think it is more than time to put this weary and equivocal inquiry once and for all to rest. It assumes a teacher with a body of instruction to impart which will automatically produce a foreseen effect in a receptive pupil. We all know that what the pupil learns is often not what the teacher teaches; yet he learns, and the teacher may well have performed a service despite himself.

Better questions can be asked. Can those with some degree of talent or aptitude learn or profit from arranged opportunities for practice under criticism? Of course. Or simply, can writers learn? They have to. Can a skillful teacher help writers to learn or improve? Do I hear anyone deny the possibility?

A colleague recently asked me a question I found sensible: is there anything communicable about the art of writing? There is, a great deal. The shop talk of writers and editors among themselves is evidence in point. "Show them, don't tell them" (a vulgarized form of the practice for which Aristotle praised Homer). "If you want to dig it up, plant it." "If it isn't there when you want to dig it up, go back and plant it." And so on, through a whole corpus of professional lore, in any degree of refinement, illustration, or subtlety of which the teacher may be capable. To establish all that is communicable about the art of writing would require volumes of close detail; it simply can't be done in a few expository sentences. And the volumes would have to be in the form of case histories, for the teaching of writing goes on patiently, over extended periods of time, in relation to his needs and temperament as an individual. The common, practical maxims — Show them, don't tell them — bear in different ways on different learners. One doesn't merely recite the maxims. One watches and studies practice, one puts one's self in so far as possible in the skin of the learner, tries to see what he is trying to do, and makes the application of lore or intuition accordingly.

"Are courses in writing valid?" Valid for what, by what standard, in relation to what goal? Questioners sometimes unconsciously assume, I think, that courses in writing are indefensible unless they "turn out" or "produce" an impossibly large proportion of professional writers. We expect a medical school to turn out doctors. We don't expect courses in history to turn out historians in anything like the same proportion.

It would be a pity if courses in history didn't recruit their share of historians to the ranks, but that is hardly the sole measure of their "validity." We hope, don't we, that the study of history will produce a larger number of citizens who if only by some lingering mental deposit understand and respect other civilizations, have a sense of the past, and are better qualified to live in the present? Writing courses are closer to history than to medical school.

We should certainly be disappointed if no good professional writers emerged from our classes, but we also expect that most of our students will "validate" our efforts if they become better readers, capable editors, or more humane citizens because they have enlarged their imaginations through first-hand experimentation with one of the principal arts.

The question of validity comes down to undebatable preference or sympathy at a certain point. Writers can gain, if the gains are obscure and indirect, by arranged opportunities to practice under criticism, or some writers can if not all. The question is, then, should formal education seek to provide such opportunities? America has made the attempt extensively. Other countries, so far as I know, regard the effort with wonder, skepticism, occasionally a suspicion that they may be withholding something valuable from their students by not trying it out themselves. Our American effort hasn't escaped quackery, proliferation of courses of small value, and false vocational encouragement, but granted a reasonably wise and well-qualified teacher, I am in deep sympathy with it. I'm sorry I can't squeeze thirty years' experience into a nutshell and make some brief, miraculous, capsule statement of what can be done and what shouldn't be attempted!

● Bernard Wirth

Fifteen years of experience teaching creative writing, or imaginative writing, to upper-class university students only served to strengthen the conviction I had in the beginning that creative writing can be taught. Those who insist that it cannot be taught seem to have the idea that the teacher would have to give the student something he was not born with. Talent, obviously, cannot be taught or learned. But surely technique can be. Every established imaginative writer has been taught, either by himself or someone else, or both. Any person possessed of an ordinary amount of imagination and intelligence can be guided, through the employment of words, in the use of these faculties to his profit — not necessarily at so many cents a word or in royalties, but in self-development, in bringing out the best that is within him, however small it may be.

The validity of an academic course in creative writing lies in its cultural value, and such a course should count just as heavily towards an arts degree as any traditional academic course.

As for the student with the out-of-the-ordinary talent for using words somewhat like magic wands, he should be treated by the college teacher of creative writing just the same as other members of the class. He presents essentially the same kind of challenge, only larger in scope. He should get the same *kind* of values from the course as the relatively untalented. The teacher should, of course, be prepared for him — prepared with rare skill to aid him in cultivating himself.

The "content" of a course in creative writing is mainly the student himself. He learns to take pains, by means of the right words and their combination, in using his mind, emotions, imagination. He learns to take pains to be accurate, to make use of his five senses in a fresh way, to perceive meaning in his surroundings and to give this meaning form. He learns to be honest with himself and his environment, and he develops greater respect and love for it and greater self-respect. He becomes a better human being and a better fellow man through intelligent, disciplined, painstaking practice in the use of his substance.

Incidentally, he increases enormously his appreciation of the printed efforts of established creative writers. In his carefully guided practice in choosing and putting words together, he will begin to learn at the very start that the reader makes his *own* story or poem or novel from the printed symbols which the author has learned to choose and combine so that they will enable the reader, through his imagination, to call upon the only experience available to him — his own.

The success of creative writing courses always depends upon the effectiveness of the teacher, who should himself be more than ordinarily endowed with all the faculties that the student needs; who could himself arrive at some success in the field if he weren't so busy helping others. The teacher should not only be thoroughly familiar with the intricacies of the art, but deeply convinced of the priceless cultural values of the sane practice of it. He should also be, as Frost once said, "an awakener." The more successful teachers of the art, I'm pretty sure, are not professional writers, who rarely have had the chance to learn to teach others.

● Walter Havighurst

I have never supposed that creative writing can be taught. But certainly it can be learned, and sometimes a teacher can help a young writer to learn the craft for himself.

The most important thing is what a writer has to say, and there is no instruction that can help him here. His choice of subject matter and the attitudes and insights which he develops — these come from something deeper and closer than a course of study. The substance of his work a writer must find in himself. A teacher can only encourage him to seek it in his own world and his own way.

But there are two other aspects of writing — form and expression — where instruction can be important. Writing has significant principles of unity and variety, proportion and emphasis. There are established methods, patterns, and techniques for a young writer to discover, and there are possible experiments for him to try. The handling of time, of viewpoint, of transition, of narrative scene and summary — these can be demonstrated and analyzed, and in certain measure they can be taught.

Likewise, expression can be analyzed and evaluated, and by instruction a young writer can be helped to find his own voice, with its valid accents and intonations. This consideration seems to me less important than that of literary form.

Literary creation has been going on for many centuries without formal courses of instruction. Only in very recent years has there been a widespread "teaching" of writing. The old, timeless methods remain: reading, "playing the sedulous ape" to the writers one admires and feels akin to, observing the world with endless curiosity and concern, trying "to be one on whom nothing is lost." Yet instruction can save a young writer years of time; it can help him to learn quickly what he would otherwise learn slowly and painfully. Most important, a writing course provides a deadline and an audience, if only an audience of one.

● Karl Shapiro

I have been teaching creative writing for about fifteen years, and if it cannot be taught, then I am a long-time impostor. My ideas on the subject are perhaps unusual because it is my belief that creativity is a universal faculty and not a freak of "genius." Most creative writing classes, unfortunately, are exclusive and devote their attention only to the already recognized student of writing. My feeling is that the person interested in writing poetry or fiction must have his educational clock turned back and his cultural inhibitions removed. I think I have had much better results with my method than with the usual method of holding up the great models of literature. This, of course, is the "primitive" approach.

● **Malcolm Cowley**

Writing is an art and writing is a craft. The art is difficult or impossible to teach, but most of the craft can be reduced to rules derived from the practice of dead artists. Therefore students in writing or composition courses (I object to Creative Writing as the title for a course, since nobody can make a student creative) may learn a great deal and save themselves years of wasted efforts. The craft they can learn is essential, since the art of writing is inefficacious without the craft, just as genius is almost useless without talent.

Note that art and craft, genius and talent, inspiration and patient effort, creation and self-criticism, all paired terms of the sort, are roughly interchangeable. The first term in each pair refers to the unconscious element in writing, the second to the consciously controlled element. Anything that is under conscious control can be taught and learned.

Nobody ever says that courses in musical composition are useless and should be abolished, although the problems in that field of instruction are much the same as in teaching writing.

● **Nolan Miller**

Writing — and certainly creativity — will never be taught. But I am not at all cynical. I have seen it happen again and again and with astonishing success with quite very young, intelligent people — writing can be learned. And it seems best for young people to learn most of all about readers. In a group, in a class, with a small number of his fellows, for the first time — as for almost the last time, if he becomes a professional writer — he tries himself out with readers. This is most important of all to learn; and is there any other way? — that nothing can be said to be “written” that has not, finally, reached some solitary, unknown reader. It is the rare occasion when the reader communicates. The writing class is one of the places where this communication can happen. This is all that needs to happen. Perhaps few members of a class are “writers.” But all of them are readers. And if only one real “writer” is in that class, because of his readers, I think he can learn something about how to do a little better what it is he wants to do.

● **Earle G. Eley**

Creative writing is that type of writing which requires the individual to make for himself his own domain and then to remain, if he is to be successful, consistent in this domain. Actually, this is not too much different from the kind of writing required from students in the regular Freshman English course; it merely goes further and allows the student more freedom

in choosing the kind of writing he wishes to engage in. Thus, there is a sense in which a creative writing course is a microcosm of the entire Liberal Arts program since it requires that the student synthesize a world out of his own personal and academic experience and make of this a consistent whole.

Such a course is valid because it helps the student develop a skill which is very closely related to all the problem-solving situations he will meet in life, even if he does not become "a writer." He must, in a good creative writing course, necessarily face the problem of seeing things from a point of view other than his own — the very essence of problem solving.

● John Fandel

Does it seem flippant to answer the question if creative writing can be taught by asking another? Can anything be taught? I sometime have a hunch that creative writing is considered kind of mysterious — too mysterious to talk about, not possible to teach. But I "teach" it anyway, as boldly as the physicist teaches his mysteries, but with, perhaps, a more creative boldness; or, at least, of a different sort.

And then, are courses in creative writing valid, another question we who take or give them, having taken them, ask ourselves. (They are, of course, but we ask ourselves to prove it to ourselves, to convince ourselves.) If nothing else, they make us, the teacher and the taught, more aware of what man can possibly say about what man can know, in another way than the sciences; they complete man and increase in him a love of creation. Is this not valid, I ask myself.

How these questions make me count my words — and count my lucky stars! It would be sad if only that which shows men how to make bombs (since some extreme as this is suggested, too, by such questions) were considered "teachable" and "valid," without respect for that which results (only sometimes) in poems.

Yes, I say, to both questions.



The Perfect Husband

● Ruth Chessman

Ellen felt the first faint hint of disaster when Rickey stepped into the house. Tonight was a Friday night like almost a hundred that had gone before — they'd been married close to two years. Rickey Garber came home every Friday night after five days on the road. This time, as always, he set down his sample bag and bent to kiss her. The set of his shoulders reminded her of Tony Curtis, the way so many things about Rickey reminded her of different actors.

There wasn't a thing about all this to stir the subtle fear in Ellen. She knew it, but knowing it didn't drive the feeling away. Nevertheless she had very good news to tell Rickey. She waited for him to ask her. She wanted to burst out with her answer. Yes, she would say, yes, darling, we're really going to have a baby. But in spite of his anxiety about it before he'd left Monday, in spite of his insistence that she must go to the doctor that very day, he never even mentioned it once. That must have been why she had this odd feeling that there was something wrong with tonight.

Maybe it was just that she was so much happier to see him than he ever was to see her. It was all on her side, all the feeling. She was sure Rickey loved her, of course; he was her husband, faithful and steady — but so cold, so unreachable! Now as he shrugged out of his topcoat, she thought tenderly, look at how handsome he is. Rickey had once

told her he'd always wanted to be an actor, and with those looks he'd surely have been a success. Brawny, black-haired, and with quiet eyes—something like Errol Flynn — she was sure she hadn't been the only girl in love with him. Tonight he seemed a little pale, though.

"Tired, honey?" she asked.

He shook his head, looking into the mirror that hung in their small reception hall. His eyes did not flick the short distance to meet hers.

"No." He amplified: "I hurt my arm, is all."

At her expression of concern he said quickly, "Nothing much, Ellie. My right arm, though, so I can't hand over my pay," and at last he grinned at her. "Here, reach into my pocket." He held his arm motionless while she took the pay envelope from his pocket. On Fridays he went to the home office of the McCracken Tool Company in Lower Falls to turn in the orders he'd taken during the week, and to get his pay. He followed this procedure religiously, although it meant that after a week's driving to cover his territory, he had an additional three-hour ride home from the Lower Falls office to here in Canton.

"Gotta get my dough, honey," he'd said, when she suggested he mail his orders in and have the company send him a check, so she decided he must simply enjoy the meetings he had with his boss. Anyway, she wouldn't interfere — she hoped she'd never be that kind of wife!

Ordinarily she opened the envelope at once so he could preen himself in her pride at the amount of his extra earnings, the commissions which varied from week to week. Tonight, however, she tossed it carelessly onto the kitchen table and said anxiously, "Let me help you with that arm, Rickey."

He said carefully, "No, honey. I'll take care of it. It isn't much, anyway. A sliver of steel chipped off a machine, and I caught it. McCracken had to show me the new assembly line at the plant; you'd think it was his own little egg he just laid, so I had to be the mickey. If the nurse hadn't knocked off for the day, I'd have been fixed up there before I left. Just let me have your eyebrow tweezers and a bandaid."

In silence she obeyed. He went into the bathroom, locking the door. A little later she heard him groan, and she felt faint with fright, but it was only an instant after that when he opened the door. He was paler now, but he was smiling a little.

"Here," he said, and dropped the tweezers into her hand. They were still wet with the hot water he had used to rinse them.

"Open my envelope, Ellen," he said, and walked past her into the back hall. The incinerator door opened and shut with a little clang. How odd, throwing a piece of steel into the incinerator, she thought fleetingly, but it was one of those thoughts that come and go before you know it.

She opened the envelope, then gasped at the fat pile of tens. "Two hundred extra!" she said with an astonishment she knew would please him.

"Commission de luxe," he said proudly.

"Well," said Ellie, but try as she

would, her customary enthusiasm was absent. That arm — "Come, eat," was all she could think of. "Your supper's ready."

"No, never mind. This arm hurts like the devil. I'm going to lie down. Take a couple of aspirins, maybe."

Ellie listened as the bed sounded all the familiar squeaks and noises. Her heart pounded with fear. What if he's really sick? she thought. Not once since they first met had he ever been even slightly ill. One of the first things she'd noticed about him had been that air of good health. It was as much part of him as his good looks. It was one of the things that had attracted her in the first place. She had never so much as smiled at a stranger before Rickey, but she had put a beckon on her lips for him. She had been lonely at her first job and her first time living away from her father. Rickey, with a loneliness that mirrored her own, had reached out to her hopefully. A handsome man in a handsome car, a stranger passing through town. His strength had promised strength to spare. A pickup, she'd thought at the time, a little shocked but mostly hugging herself with joy at all the wonderful things his practiced kisses promised her. But now he was her husband, and it scared her to think his strength might be failing at last.

She shook her head as if to ward it off. She was thin and small, an unspectacular blond girl who had by sheer good luck married a successful, clever husband.

Rickey was fast asleep a few minutes after he lay down, and she sat quietly on the bedroom chair watching him for a long time. At nine o'clock she tiptoed out of the apartment. She had no special place to go, but she left the privacy and safety of their three snug little rooms,

just because she had to be moving. She walked down the hill to the noisy Rapanne River that outlined the east side of the city. She stood in the dark, staring down, listening to the slapping flow of the water.

Suddenly, as if she were saying the words aloud to Rickey, she heard them in her mind: *It was a bullet, wasn't it?*

But it couldn't have been. He had told her the truth. Never had she found anything he told her to be a lie: therefore it followed that he could speak only truth. Rickey worked hard, had no secrets from her. He just couldn't possibly have a bullet in his arm. It was simply out of character, that's all. It was like expecting Van Johnson to go home to his wife with a bullet in his arm. Rickey simply could not have a bullet wound, not even a flesh wound, that a man could take care of himself with a pair of eyebrow tweezers.

She turned, impatient with herself over all this nonsense, and started back. What if Rickey woke needing her? She began to hurry, and as she almost ran, she began to list the comforting facts in her mind: Fact. Rickey was respectable for all his secretiveness. Fact. She loved Rickey and he loved her. Fact. He had never to her knowledge lied to her.

Except for her father, now living his quiet life in Chicago, Rickey was her everyone. Her whole life was wrapped up in their future, in their coming child. So he couldn't lie to her.

But as she reached the foot of the hill, she knew there was one other fact, contradictory as it might seem in the face of everything she called fact. She knew from her heart that there had been a bullet in Rickey's arm.

She let herself into the apartment quietly. She undressed in the bathroom, then walked on bare feet into the bedroom. Rickey was breathing evenly, quietly. She let up the shade slowly so that she could open the window. The street light lit up the room a little, and she could see that he seemed relaxed and comfortable. She felt a dozen years older than Rickey at that moment, and yet she was barely twenty to his thirty. But his sleeping look reassured her, and she got into bed beside him with the same grateful feeling she always had. How lucky she was! He was really the perfect husband every girl dreamed of.

In the morning, she could see that Rickey was all right. He was perfectly all right.

"Oh, Rickey," she said awkwardly.

He looked at her lazily and grinned. "Hi, honey," he said. "Did I scare you?"

In spite of herself she burst into tears of relief. He said gently, "Honey, don't you know you're not supposed to worry about husbands? It's their job to do the worrying. They provide and care for the family."

The words sounded quaint. They made her catch her breath, touched as she often was by his oddly idealistic views. It was when he spoke like this that she'd remember he had been no average boy, growing up in the home of affectionate parents. Handed about from unwilling aunt to aunt since he was an infant, no wonder he had learned to live by dreams. Reality had been none too sweet. He was lonely, he would always be lonely, with the wistful, insurmountable loneliness of the unwanted child.

"I can't help worrying about you,"

she said tearfully.

"Well, you don't have to any more," he told her cheerily.

For a moment she expected him to pull her to him for a kiss. He always showed his love for her in a clear conventional pattern, satisfying to both of them, but still one that always reminded her of a movie romance. She'd grown dependent upon these gestures which years of movies had taught her to interpret as proof of true love. And she could tell now, watching him, that he thought of it. But he did not move towards her, and suddenly she cried, "Your arm, Rickey!"

He lifted it a little way, as if to look at it, then he let it drop. Although her eyes never left his face, she did not see a wince or any other sign of pain. So it must really be all right.

"Hungry?" she asked.

"No," he said. She felt startled. Rickey was a very satisfactory man to feed, and this absence of appetite was entirely without precedent. He added hastily, "Just coffee. I must be coming down with a cold."

She got him the coffee, and watched warily as he drank it.

"You're using your left hand," she said.

At the same instant, by what seemed a magic choice of subjects, he asked the one question that could certainly drive all thoughts of his wound from her mind.

"You haven't told me what the doctor said, Ellen."

She felt silly and childish, but she could feel the blush begin at her heart and spread over her shoulders and finally cover her face. Rickey smiled tenderly and reached across the table to take her right hand. *With his left.* All thoughts of the precious plans they were going to make, the

sweet plans for the house with a yard for the baby, the crib, the delicious, infinitesimal, silly details — everything fled.

"Rickey, are you sure that arm is all right?"

"It's okay, it's okay," he said impatiently.

"Promise, if it isn't better by tomorrow, you'll let me call a doctor."

"Sure, sure," Rickey said impatiently. "Now, forget it."

There was no forgetting it. Rickey was not himself. There was no movie this weekend, to both of them a real loss; there was no Sunday dinner out. Sunday night Ellen said again pleadingly, "Just let a doctor look at your arm to please me, Rickey."

"I'll be all right after a good night's sleep," he said. "If I'm not all right by tomorrow, I'll stop off at a doctor's before I get going for the day."

He fell asleep as soon as he went to bed, but anxiety kept her awake. It was early morning before she herself dozed off. She awoke almost at once to the sounds of his stirring as he dressed. She sat up, completely awake at once. The clock said six, his usual Monday rising hour.

"Rickey — how are you?"

"Better, much better," he told her briskly.

She got out of bed and ran across the room. He winced at the touch of her hand on his — his right hand, not the arm at all, but he winced!

"You're not going out!" she pleaded.

He did not answer, just marched about the room steadily, finishing his dressing in awkward movements, sparing his right arm. He did not pack his bag, and she said gently, "I know you like to pack your bag yourself, Rick. But just this once let me?"

He shook his head. "I'm not taking it. The way I feel I may be back before I need a clean shirt. If I don't come home ahead of time, you'll know everything is all right, and I'll pick up clean stuff wherever I happen to need it."

He was gone suddenly, with barely a kiss.

It was terrible. She had long since forgotten to worry about whether it was a bullet he had in his arm. His condition was all that concerned her now. Her groping fears began to increase, and suddenly, on an impulse, she called her father in Chicago. She called him at the metal products factory where he was head shipper. When she heard his calm "Hello?" she experienced a moment of deep terror and shame. She didn't know what to say, or how her father could explain away her skyrocketing fears. It took a second or two longer before she could say, "Dad — oh, Dad! It's good to hear your voice."

"Anything wrong, Ellen?" he asked quickly.

She laughed nervously. "Oh, no, nothing," she said.

There was maybe fifty cents worth of silence, then her father asked a strange question. "It isn't anything Rickey's done, is it? You can always come home to Chicago, you know."

She grabbed at the telephone as if it were going to spring away.

"Why — why Dad, what could he do?"

Her father didn't answer that. He waited long enough for her to remember the way he'd said, "Rickey Garber? Never heard of him. He's a mighty slick-looking article, isn't he? Are you sure — ?"

But of course two years ago she'd been sure, and her father hadn't said another word. Now just in the same

way, he dropped Rickey and said, "You're all right, Ellen?"

"Fine," she said automatically, but the tone of his voice softened her so that she almost burst into tears. She remembered his unfailing understanding. When his factory had opened a branch in Chicago, and he'd been sent to take over the shipping there, he'd made no effort to force her. Her mother had just died, and she hadn't wanted to leave the East. He was good to her, and she had no right to saddle him with worries that might have no foundation. She thought suddenly of what she could say that would give reason to her call, and she rushed eagerly into it: "I wanted to tell you you're going to be a grandpa by Christmas."

Her father was suitably surprised and pleased, and best of all, he was reassured. When she hung up, she thought, what a fool I was! She felt so good after her talk with her father that the worry about Rickey began to recede until by the end of the day it all but vanished.

The week trickled by. She made her first purchase for the coming child, a tiny yellow nightgown. She wanted to buy more, but she couldn't raise any enthusiasm over it. She thought she would wait until Rickey came home, and they would shop together, a little each week. She wished it was time for Rickey to come home. She kept wishing it was Friday, and then one day it was Friday, and suddenly all her scared thoughts came right out into the open. The morning dragged, lasting forever. By noon she had made up her mind. She would put in a call to his office, and as soon as he got in, he could call her back. That would save her at least three hours of worry.

"McCracken Tool Company?" the operator repeated. "Is that capital

em, see, capital see?"

"That's right," Ellen said.

After a moment, "I'm sorry," the operator said. "There is no phone listed under that name."

Ellen got a little impatient. She wasn't suspicious, only impatient. "There must be a number," she said positively. "It's in the McCracken Building," she added, thinking about Mr. McCracken as she waited.

Mr. McCracken was a big fat red-head with a piping voice. Although she had never seen him or talked to him, he was as real to her as if he stood in the room. Rickey had described him, and with that trick that made him seem able to change personalities at will, he had dropped into McCracken's, had brought him to life for her, big lumbering body and thin high voice.

"I'm sorry," said the operator again, after a lapse of time. "Are you sure you're spelling it right?"

Ellen hung up. A manufacturing plant that could afford to have a dozen salesmen — Rickey had once told her at least a dozen — must certainly have been big enough to have a switchboard full of phones. She sat still, unable to move. First Rickey's arm, with a bullet in it (no quibbling now). Next, no McCracken Tools. She picked up the phone again, very slowly, and called the station. There was a train in fifty-eight minutes that stopped for a minute at Lower Falls.

On the train she sat absolutely still, like a petrified human, which she was. The trip took two and a half hours. Then she had to get a cab and give the address. It was quite near the station, once the driver remembered that there really was a McCracken Building. "It's that old red brick on the corner of Milsom, ain't it?"

Then at last she stood in the grimy lobby, reading the list of tenants, no longer expecting and not finding any McCracken Company.

She stood indeterminately, then asked the old man on the elevator, "Is there anyone named McCracken in the building?"

He gaped stupidly. "This here is the McCracken Building."

"I know. Is there anyone in it by that name?"

He seemed to think, if scratching his head was any indication. "The only ones I don't know the names of, is them in 317. You don't mean them, do you? They ain't nobody else name of McCracken in the building; so if it's anyone, it's got to be them."

He took her up to the third floor and left her. On the door of the room was a note, strung over the knob. "Back in an hour." It was old and dirty, as if it had been used like this for months, but it was in Rickey's writing. Wherever it was she was going, she had arrived. She tried the door, and it opened. Within the hour she'd see Rickey. She went in and shut the door. The office was bare, except for a single chair. She sat down on it, folded her hands, and waited.

In only a few minutes the door snapped open and a man, not Rickey at all, came in. This man was not very tall, a thin, dark fellow, not much to look at but purposeful in the way he shut the door behind him, in the way he stopped short when he saw her, in the way he stood coolly looking at her.

"Who are you?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm Rickey's wife," she said.

He did not seem surprised. "I'm Court," he said, as if he didn't expect her to know the name. She had never heard it. He walked swiftly

about the room, swung open the door of a closet, and peered inside. "Empty," he said, his voice smug with satisfaction. "That's that, then."

He took out a spotless handkerchief, shook it out, and went methodically over the room, the doors, window. "Stand up, Ellen," he said, and rubbed the chair arms vigorously. He knew her first name. He must know Rickey well.

"The end," he said.

There was a dreadful sound to it. Ellen felt as if she'd watched someone die.

"Where's Rickey?" she asked.

He looked at her thoughtfully. "How much do you know?" She shook her head helplessly, and he went on, not at all ill-naturedly, "He's in his room. He picked up a slug last Friday, and the wound got infected. Come along."

She followed him without a question. She got into the two-tone gray Cadillac convertible with Court and said nothing until it had pulled smoothly into the line of traffic.

"He has a room here in Lower Falls?" she asked slowly, searching unwillingly for pieces of the puzzle.

"Natch," said Court. "Where'd you expect him to sleep? It's the same room he had before he got married — he never gave it up. How much has he told you?"

"Then there's no McCracken Tool Company?"

He laughed as if he were really amused. "Cripes, McCracken! I suppose there was a McCracken once, but the McCracken Building was put up in the eighties. I can see he didn't tell you much. Rickey invented the tool company."

"But Rickey did sell tools," she said. Her lips were stiff.

Court ignored that. "Listen, to save my own skin, I gotta tell you.

The more you know, the less you'll want to go squawking to the cops. Rickey invented the whole thing, tool salesman and all. He's my boy," negligently, "my payoff man, my rubout man. Those big bonuses he earned every once in a while, what do you suppose they were for? Because he was cute?"

"For — for killing?" Ellen whispered.

"I don't like murder," Court said.

"I got a nice clean racket, never mind what it is, and I don't like to dirty it up with blood. But once in a while I got to."

She felt sick to death. Nothing could be worse than this. She felt as if all the blood had been wrung out of her. She was sure the shock would kill her baby. When the car stopped, her knees trembled so much she didn't think she could get out. But she made it and, still trembling, managed to walk up the outside flight of steps, then the inside flight, Court leading the way all the time. Without knocking, he opened a door on the second floor.

"Look what I brung you, boy," he said.

Rickey was lying on the bed fully clothed. Flushed, unshaven for days, his eyes at first seeming glazed and unseeing. But after a moment he focused and said, "Ellen."

"Oh, Rickey," she said, and ran to him, but he held her off with his left hand, moving it heavily, like a drunk.

"Don't touch me," he said, and seemed to lapse into a daze.

She turned to Court, whispering, "He's so sick."

"He's dying," Court said flatly. "He hasn't got a chance. I'm waiting for him to go into a coma for good, then I call a doctor. I don't dare let him go to the hospital while he's

conscious, see, or even while he can babble in his sleep. But when he gets real bad, see — ? I want to send him to the hospital while he's still alive, so nobody can say I neglected him."

"It's inhuman," said Ellen, just breathing the words. She looked at her husband with a confusing detachment, as if she hardly knew him. Yet he was her husband, the father of her child, the perfect husband she had lived and breathed for. "I want to call a doctor," she said, and burst into ragged sobs.

Court walked over to stand by the bed. "Rickey Garber," he said, then bent over, shaking him. Ellen winced, because Court had grasped Rickey's right arm. But Rickey only mumbled.

"Okay, sister," said Court, and walked past her. "I want to be the one to call the doctor."

She let him go without a word, although she suspected he would not be back. But Court came back almost at once, and in about fifteen minutes the doctor came.

"Why haven't I been called before?" he asked sharply after his first look at Rickey.

"We just found him," Court said. "Just now. His wife came looking for him at the office, and I brought her over as a favor. Never figured he was even sick."

Ellen hardly listened. She was looking at Rickey. *He killed! He killed for money!* The doctor's words sifted through to her. "I don't know—" He looked about the austere little room indeterminately. "I suppose he ought to be in a hospital—"

"Spare no expense," Court said hastily. "Nothing's too good for my pal Rickey." And then, innocently, "What's wrong with him, anyway?"

"It's almost impossible now to tell what happened — a wound of some sort, but it's swelled up so I can't recognize what caused it. Anyway, it almost doesn't matter." He glanced accusingly at Ellen. "I could have helped, earlier."

An ambulance, and its clang lessening in the distance. The empty room, with almost no sign now of previous habitation. "I'll drive you right to the hospital," Court told her. "Just give me five minutes." He worked efficiently through the room, disturbing nothing, searching, taking a few papers, setting fire to them in an ashtray.

"It's like he was never here," Court said, with the same smug satisfaction he had shown earlier at the McCracken Building.

In Court's car on the way to the hospital she thought, let me see if I understand, and the appalling thing was that she did, she understood everything. Rickey had been a crook and a hoodlum and a murderer, and she had never guessed. He'd invented a life story and lived it, and to her it had been real. A whole two years of pretense fell into shape, two years of watching Rickey act like the husband they both wanted him to be. No wonder he'd always seemed like a movie composite — that's actually what he had been. The movies were all he'd ever had as a model.

She knew it, and she did not weep. Not then, nor two days later when he died. She did not weep when she went home to pack her few belongings, nor when she sent his things to the Salvation Army. Not even when her father came for her and she had to tell him the truth of it all, not even then did the tears come.

"I hate to say it," her father told her, "because I know it's so fresh it

still hurts, but you're lucky to be out of it as easy as this. No scandal, nothing to hurt you or the child."

"Oh, no," she whispered, and now she had tears for Rickey — but they were not for the little boy in him who had never known a mother's love. They were not for the man who sought a cruel revenge on a world that had been cruel to him; nor were they even for the lonely man she had always known him to be, her poor Rickey locked away

from her and from everyone in his own sad and loveless world.

No, she mourned Rickey Garber, her husband, the man she married, who kissed like Clark Gable and laughed like Robert Mitchum and had manners like Joseph Cotten and who looked like Rock Hunter and Tony Curtis and a little bit like Robert Montgomery.

"He was a perfect husband," she sobbed; oh, yes, now indeed she wept.

Bernice Skating

● Stephen Morris

Glide wonder down the frozen water,
Slow in mid-air and spin
A heartbreak of soared laughter,
But let deep stillness win
Over the wildness and grow tauter.

Whirl splendor out of weightless turning
In the teal air of dusk,
As you break free from earth in gyring.
Carved rapture on this husk
Of river torments all my learning.

Carve lightness, darling, into morning.

The Unanticipated Knowledge

● Claude F. Koch

I

Anyone attempting to make a fiction must certainly expect to undergo alternating periods of satisfaction and discouragement. In general, the satisfactions must outweigh the discouragements, or there would be fewer people working at the craft. It is one of the *satisfactions* of novel writing that is the subject of this paper: the satisfaction of coming quite unexpectedly — at moments when the novel would seem to be furthest from the writer's mind — upon an understanding that may illuminate the life in the novel and beyond it.

These understandings, these uncalculated discoveries, that supply some of the very real joy in writing, would appear to be distinguished by the degree to which they may or may not function in the world beyond the novel.

To come, quite by surprise, upon an insight into character that seems inevitable in the actual world (and potentially inevitable in the world of the novel); to come, again without anticipation, upon a correspondence that seems to illuminate (however slightly) both the situation in the novel and a potential situation in life; to come upon a descriptive epithet that hastens a harmonious and meaningful integration within the novel — these are among the uncalculated discoveries that bring satisfaction off and on in the working of a novel and that help to sustain the writer in the dull periods when there seems to be little but the intractable resistance of the medium to a plodding imagination. I intend to take these three recurring experiences, one at a time, illustrate them from a novel in progress, and try to get at some understanding of them.

In this novel — *The Lives of Others* — the problem developed of capturing in a first draft the sense of a minor character, a child of nine or ten. There was the fairly common experience of visualizing him quite clearly in action with other characters in the story, without being able to hear his voice (though in the mind's eye I could see the very movements of his mouth, the contours of the lips, the tone of the skin, the shape of the skull), but, above all, I could not realize him in terms of a single distinguishing and truly notable characteristic: the sort of thing that makes a person linger in the consciousness long after he has gone; the sort of thing that seems to sum up all you really need to know about him. This was resolved for me over a period of about a month without my being aware that the character was steadily present to my mind at all.

Each morning I drive out into Huntingdon Valley along Old Second Street, and I guess I have noticed for a long while without the matter really registering with me that there are "Deer Crossing" signs at a point below the Bethayres Station. These signs *did* register one morning about a month

after I had introduced this child into the action — and on that morning I was also struck by the commonplace and not particularly intelligent thought that I had never seen a deer in the vicinity of that road. And at that moment, driving along there in the car, without the novel on my mind at all, I saw this boy, this character, crouched down by the side of the road, waiting patiently for deer that never came, near one of these yellow "Deer Crossing" signs. In my manuscript this perception is stated in the mouth of the child's mother, as recollected months afterward by the father (in this quotation the child's name is Paul, the mother's Natalie, the father's Narbeth, and the locale is called the Bow):

This was Paul's Place in the geography of the Bow. Six years before, a noncommittal functionary of the State Forestry Service had posted his yellow sign "Deer Crossing" here, for reasons, Natalie had said, known more surely to the Department than to the deer. And Paul had become a watcher here. Narbeth remembered his wife's observation on that: Natalie had said that he would *do* that — watch patiently for deer that never came. It was his nature.

Now I would be interested in knowing if this particular incident, come upon in this casual way, represents a shadowing forth in precise terms of the nature of a child I have known or is new knowledge concerning the potential attitudes of childhood? I suspect it is a combination of both. Something, as Frost writes, that to some degree I didn't know I knew. But this type of discovery, I think, has a special place, and endures beyond its pragmatic function in the novel. It seems to me to be the kind of truth the lyric poet might celebrate — truth that in the novel (which exists not to celebrate experience but to propose the logic of experience) must be subdued to the demands of the whole. One could say of this: it is knowledge particularized and carried to the heart, and certainly operative in the life of the writer beyond its function in the novel.

A second uncalculated discovery that brings satisfaction I have mentioned: it is the discovery of a workable and illuminating correspondence (which might not establish the core of the poem, as I believe the former could, but might certainly be part of the major machinery of a poem). More than a mere analogy, it is the type of thing that for the medieval and renaissance writer helped to fix more firmly the conviction of the eminently reasonable, interrelated, and echoing structures of the world — but for us is perhaps only a sustaining fancy, a workable way of "reading" a phase of human experience. Here is my illustration of such a correspondence unexpectedly come upon:

My protagonist is a man in his fifties, father of a family of three children, completely absorbed in his family and committed to the lovely valley in upper Pennsylvania in which this family lives — rooted in it, aware of its past, and unlikely to think seriously of the possibility of his not holding firm to this life in its basic aspects.

The first break in this fabric occurs when his oldest son enlists in the service in 1942. The father, who cannot tolerate this fracture, tries to get an old reserve commission reactivated to follow his son, for reasons that he imperfectly understands himself. The analogy or correspondence useful in

this situation came when I had no conscious consideration of the novel on my mind. A florist near my home is the director of a planting commission whose job it is to keep up trees on the major streets. He chose a very odd oriental tree for one of the streets, and I asked him about his choice, in a moment of casual conversation. He told me that a tree's branches would not extend beyond its roots, and as this type tree had a close root system, he was assured that the branches wouldn't be tapping at store windows. I can't vouch for the botanical accuracy of all this, and, anyway, in the novel (in which this becomes part of the meditation of the father on his son's enlistment and its effect on himself and the household) I have done violence to the statement as the florist made it to me. In the quotation which follows, Fiddler's Bow is the name of the family home:

A tree's roots, he had heard somewhere, would not out-reach its widest branches. That was it . . . something went deep at Fiddler's Bow, and if that one branch, Dennis, had not been swept in his unruly, unpredictable way out, the roots would scarcely yet strive beyond the hills of the Bow.

Here is uncalculated "knowledge" — a knowledge of a usable relationship of a different (and probably inferior) order than the other. But this sort of knowledge involving correspondences especially interests me. What kind of validity does it have, I wonder? Is it any less "true" than the physicist's in the statement that an electron "spins"? He is certainly proposing an analogy there. The image that is in his consciousness when he uses the word *spin* must be of a sense experience available to himself — something predicated only analogically of the electron that he can't see (any more than I can see directly the spirit of whom my analogy is predicated). What may be said of both is that they work — his concerning the electron whose actual activity may not correspond to his image suggested by the word *spin*, mine concerning the father whose spiritual relations with his son may not correspond in its activity to that of the root and branch relationship in the tree. I think that perhaps a real distinction lies not in the truth of the analogies, but in their subjects: his pertains to an actual existence, mine to a potential one. However, both predictions may successfully work in life. He may "deal" with the electron as though it actually does "spin." I may "deal" with a person as though my analogy actually describes a phase of his spiritual activity (in the order of life, I mean, as well as the order of art). We will both do this until we are proven wrong. Neither of us, in the meantime, thinks that he has fastened upon a mere metaphor, rather than a truth.

This is the experience of not analogy alone, nor metaphor alone — but that perception of identity (closest, perhaps, to what in the medieval and renaissance world was identified as a *correspondence*) that yields an insight into substance rather than accident. We have had the experience, very rarely, of a folk-saying coming home to us with the conviction that it contains — not a venerable and partial revelation but, in a particular case, an absolute, hard-core, and immutable truth. It is a conviction of *that* nature. Again, it is knowledge particularized and carried to the heart.

The third kind of knowledge, unforeseen and surprising, is applicable only to the novel being made. It is the unexpected seizure of a probable fact (probable within the context of the novel) that illuminates certain common,

obscure reaches of the novel landscape — reaches that are no less difficult to fix for all their apparent insignificance.

In *The Lives of Others* the husband and wife, 20 years before the action of the novel opens, had bought a house — a gatehouse to a demolished estate. I felt I should name the gatehouse, but for months I could only insert a dash where such a name should be. Driving out one Sunday afternoon past estates near Bluebell — without my having the novel on my mind — “Fiddler’s Bow” occurred to me and simultaneously an image of the landscape of which the name was descriptive: a long road springing out of an arc of trees (more like a bowstring used in archery in its contours) and certain vague but associated relationships concerning the sweep of a bow across a violin, the snapping of a string (as in *The Cherry Orchard*), the flight of an arrow, and so forth. Physical description, analogy, metaphor, symbol — all at once, and most of them, I believe, usable in the novel.

Where did this come from? Perhaps because I had visited my parents’ home the day before and passed a very old music shop with a great bull fiddle hung as a sign outside; perhaps because I used a name in the story of a friend whose hobby is archery. But, in any case, in that place where a novel continues to get made — away from the typewriter and the conscious mind — a selection of this composite image occurred, and some very useful details of the novel were assured.

These experiences confirm me in the belief that the novel gets made almost as much when one does not consciously contemplate its details or its over-all structure, as it does during the actual time at the typewriter. It would seem to be always hovering in the background or substrata of current experience (and the application of that experience to itself) that goes steadily or intermittently on below the conscious level.

These unanticipated discoveries, of course (and especially the first two types I have described), may be made by any contemplative person. They may even come as part of the experience of *reading* a fiction. But the business of putting a story together would seem to supply the ideal circumstances for their appearance, because the work demands a search for harmonious and meaningful relationships in a medium that carries the past always with it and forces the discipline of comparison and choice.

Are they discoveries of “truth”? The writer will be convinced that they are — but his conviction is only confirmed when he has communicated to others who say, “Yes, I see.” They are his “instruments” by which he tests the validity of his discoveries.

II

I have spoken of the satisfaction and often the joy of writing that are nearly always there, even in the presence of difficulties; in fact, the difficulties compound to make possible the joy. But, occasionally — and I don’t think I am alone in this by any means — my own experience has been of acute depression: a questioning of the worth of the activity itself — the withdrawal required, the apparent non-utility. And at these times I wonder if there isn’t a moral necessity to give it up, to turn more fully to work that more obviously contributes to sustain society. It can be given up, I should

think; we have Alcoholics Anonymous for addicts of another compelling habit to which one loses sleep, good disposition, and the inclination to think of others immediately at hand. But I rationalize thus: I tell myself (what I at other times firmly believe) that the novel in one of its dominant manifestations today is steadily a most subtle advocate for order, saying by the logic of its essential form that acts have consequences, that effects quite obviously have causes, that chance (mere chance) is unthinkable, that we are bound in a chain of responsibility, of cause and effect. The novel, with its harmonious and "inevitable" relationships, will not tolerate chance, will not tolerate — even — mere possibility at the sacrifice of probability. It is a continued argument for order; and allegory of an ordered world (either perceived or simply desired) is much more compelling than a *merely* logical argument for the same to one who knows how to read the novel, just as a casual glimpse of a smash in the jaw is likely to be more compelling than a theoretical argument against violence. In writing a novel, we are relatively free at the beginning to set our conditions, but once they are assented to, we must "bow with a grace to reason," submit ourselves to the logic of the fictive life we have proposed . . .

Any other course prohibits the novel being seen as a symbol of reasoned activity (which indeed it is) and is dishonorable besides.

Bonesong

● George Murray

This bone-chain
rooted to ball of earth
echoes its song
on the clangor
of steel trap sky
a long time sprung

Sometime bonesong
soaring in flame
will rend itself
with all balls molten
and sky jaws
swinging wide.

In the Bosom of the Father

Jn. 1:18

● Daniel J. Rogers

He, John Wright perhaps, a stranger, walks the squalid
ways of Centertown
prim with decay and storage; squalid-
mean, think-repelling, sense heavy Centertown

(in heat) the sidewalks hunch this frame
of tender Apollo, tall, blond youth. With
head just lacking perfection and frame
the least bit lanky, he cannot be confused for long with

deity. John is man

enough

to twinge when they approach: two lean-bosomed girls, young
for their tinkly laughter, not old enough
for their muffled, pretended observations to be inviting. Much too young

and ordinary for these fraudulent airs.
Almost passed, as though casually, they
eye him . . . with disinterested airs . . .
and shriek quite suddenly over something they

think is funny. So harlot white and harlot
gay. and harlot hollow and harlot young,
plain- and empty-faced, unsmiling-harlot-
eyed: they fling their heads as do the young

to titter. And like their flat cemented
walks they ask for no impression while, warm
with the freshness of an imperfect god, he spots cemented
world with sweat. John, college-bound John Wright, is warm

with another heat: he's sick; afraid
to have to bend and retch

and retch

he is afraid.

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